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RESEARCH NOTE LS-61

LAKE STATES FOREST EXPERIMENT STATION, • U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

## The Importance of Fishing as an Attraction and Activity in the Quetico-Superior Area

How important is fishing as a Lake States recreational activity? Opinions on this point vary. Resort operators usually consider fishing their key attraction. Most of them believe that improved fishing is essential for improved business.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, tourist industry consultants often advance the idea that the importance of fishing for resort success has been overestimated and recommend diversification of appeals and activities.<sup>2</sup> There is general uncertainty about what importance campers and other types of visitors attach to fishing.

Data concerning fishing in the Quetico-Superior area of northeast Minnesota and adjacent Ontario, collected as part of a broader study, may shed some light on this general

question. These findings may also help to clarify the role of fishing as one of the area's recreational resources.

There are many possible ways of looking at the importance of fishing. Several of these viewpoints are represented in Table 1, which shows percentage responses of seven types of visitors to eight questions involving fishing. Responses to the first two questions (included in the table for completeness) and the sampling procedures have been previously reported.<sup>3</sup> Although one would expect fishing to be a particularly important recreation activity in this area, the data suggest that its importance varies considerably among types of visitors.

Variation in the role of fishing as an attraction, shown in the first three questions, was large. Motorized canoeists and boat campers, more than any other group, gave fishing as their reason for deciding to visit the Quetico-Superior area (Question A). Fishing was mentioned less often as a reason for choosing a particular spot within the area,

<sup>1</sup> For example, in Wisconsin 63 percent of sample resort operators considered fishing the main attraction. "Stocking fish" was cited as a needed State action by 17 percent and was exceeded only by "more promotion." "Improving lakes" was mentioned by 5 percent, and ranked fifth. Source, I. V. Fine and Roy E. Tuttle, *The Tourist Overnight Accommodation Industry in Wisconsin*, Wis. Dept. of Resource Development, Madison, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> This view has been expressed at many meetings and in several newspaper reports. An example can be found in the *Minnesota Tourist Travel Notes* 2(1): 1, 1964. Also pages 65 and 66 of Sielaff, Richard O., *The economics of outdoor recreation in the upper midwest*, 330 pp., illus., Duluth: Univ. of Minn. Duluth, 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Lucas, Robert C., *Recreational use of the Quetico-Superior Area*, U.S. Forest Serv. Res. Paper LS-8, 50 pp., illus., Lake States Forest Expt. Sta., St. Paul, Minn., 1964. Also Lucas, Robert C., *The recreational capacity of the Quetico-Superior Area*, U.S. Forest Serv. Res. Paper LS-15, 34 pp., illus., Lake States Forest Expt. Sta., St. Paul, Minn., 1964.

Table 1.—Responses of seven types of Quetico-Superior visitor groups to eight questions concerning fishing, 1960-61<sup>1,2</sup>

Questions and selected answers	Canoeists		Day users (9)	Auto campers (96)	Boat campers (24)	Resort guests (57)	Pri- vate cabin users (21)
	Pad- dlers (64)	Motor- ized (21)					
<i>Percent of total</i>							
A. "What characteristics of the area attracted you?" Visitors giving "fishing" as reason	16	67	33	29	48	42	14
B. "Why did you choose this lake or route?" Visitors giving "fishing" as reason	8	24	0	1	21	18	19
C. "Why did you choose to visit Canada?" (asked of those groups that did cross into Canada) Visitors giving "better fishing" as reason	7	50	0	0	33	57	33
D. "How much fishing did your group do?" None	8	5	33	12	8	2	5
Some	66	33	22	64	33	24	67
A lot	26	62	45	24	59	74	28
E. "What was your most important activity in the area?" Visitors naming "fishing"	8	33	44	30	46	72	43
F. "What (if anything) disappointed your group?" Visitors answering "fishing"	5	14	33	5	8	35	14
G. "What (if anything) did you particularly like?" Visitors answering "fishing"	8	33	0	1	0	9	5
H. Reaction to programs "to increase fish numbers" Good idea	70	78	100	59	67	78	88
Bad idea	12	12	0	12	9	8	0
Don't care	18	10	0	39	24	14	12

<sup>1</sup> The differences between visitor types were tested by chi-square (except for questions C and G which did not have expected frequencies large enough to meet the requirements of the test). All were significant beyond the .001 level, meaning that there

was less than one chance in a thousand that a sample of this size would produce differences this large by chance.

<sup>2</sup> Figures in parentheses are numbers of sample groups.

but the same two groups still led in giving this response (Question B). At least half of the resort guests and motor canoeists who visited Canada based their decisions on expected fishing quality (C).

The reported amount of fishing done, in subjective terms (D), varied greatly. Resort guests reported the most fishing, car campers the least. Canoeists who used motors differed sharply from those who did not. Fishing was rated as "the most important activity" engaged in by almost three-fourths of the resort guests, but by less than a tenth of the paddling canoe-trippers (E).

Satisfaction with fishing was also uneven. Visitors were not asked directly how they liked the fishing, but they were asked free-response questions about disappointments and about things particularly liked. Fishing was not a common disappointment (F), except for resort guests and the small sample of day-users. Nevertheless, complaints about fishing outnumbered disappointments over facilities, cleanliness, crowding, etc. When asked if they particularly liked anything about the area (G), only motor canoeists commonly mentioned the fishing. Scenery, lack of crowds, and several other qualities received many

more favorable mentions. Among resort guests, fishing drew only about one-fourth as many favorable mentions as unfavorable. All of the other visitor types seemed fairly well satisfied with the fishing, except perhaps for day-users for whom the sample was too small to permit a firm conclusion.

Management programs to improve fishing were generally favored, but not as universally as might have been expected (H). Auto campers were least approving. The most common reason expressed for disapproval was that such programs would attract more people—or the “wrong kind” of people, such as “fish hogs.”

Resort guests showed interesting contrasts in their answers. Compared with several other types of visitors, fewer of them chose the area because of the fishing, but they

fished more and were least satisfied. This would support the idea that improved fishing would benefit the resort business. But it would also uphold the view that some resort guests fish a good deal, perhaps more than they plan or desire, because of a lack of alternatives. Possibly advertising that heavily emphasizes spectacular fishing produces unrealistic expectations and leads to frequent disappointment. Thus, disagreements over fishing's role in the resort business seem to stem from looking at different aspects of the problem, at least in the Quetico-Superior area.

These conclusions apply only to the Quetico-Superior, which is atypical because of the wilderness qualities of the area and the relative magnitude of different types of visitors; but investigation might show broadly similar conditions in more typical areas.

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